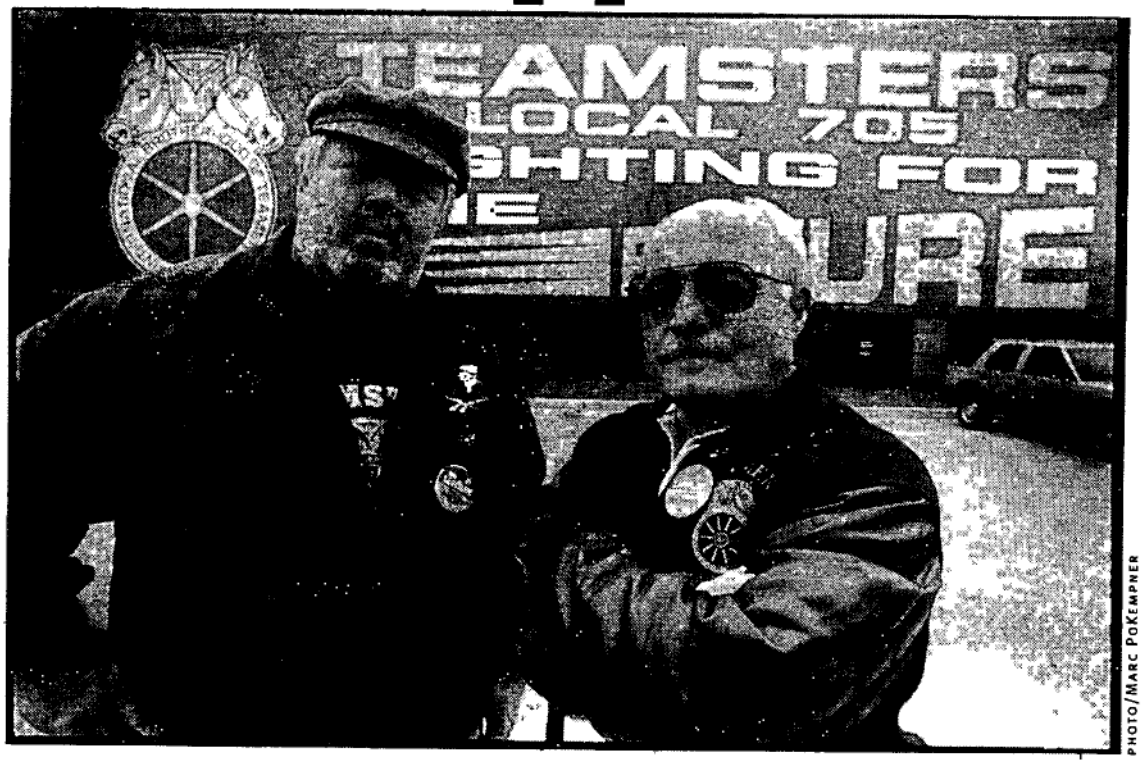
Local Opposition



PHOTO/MARC PoKEMPNER

Teamsters Gerald Zero and John McCormick greeted Ron Carey's election as the beginning of reform in Chicago. They're still waiting.

By David Moberg

John McCormick, who ran on the reform slate against James Hoffa in the national Teamster election last year, first challenged the entrenched leaders of Chicago's big Teamster Local 705 in the early 70s. Louis Peick, then the local's top officer, was a politically connected powerhouse in the international union who ran his domain with a steel fist. Union agents and off-duty cops broke up meetings that McCormick and other reformers called, and sometimes beat up the dissidents, vandalized their cars, even threatened their families. At regular union meetings independent-minded members who tried to speak out were at times confronted by bullies brandishing chains or beaten up.

To vote in union elections, members went to the union hall. When reformers ran, their supporters had to walk a long gauntlet of jeering thugs. With a wink and a nod from the union, employers also frequently disciplined or fired dissident leaders. One reformer, Bennie Jackson, lost his job seven times; he kept winning it back by hiring outside attorneys who defended him against both management and the union, but he spent many months out of work.

Not surprisingly, insurgents were invariably crushed by wide margins. But they didn't give up, and neither did reformers across the country who faced similar obstacles. As a result of their tenacity—and pressure from the federal government—there have been striking victories at both the local and national levels over the past decade. But there have also been demoralizing losses and monumental setbacks. The task of reforming the Teamsters—the second-largest union in the country, after the National Education Association—has proved extraordinarily difficult. And nowhere has that been more true than in Chicago.

The base of the Teamster reform movement in Chicago has long been at United Parcel Service. In 1969 Jackson led workers in a wildcat strike against both the company and union leaders that won workers more control over the shifts they worked and the

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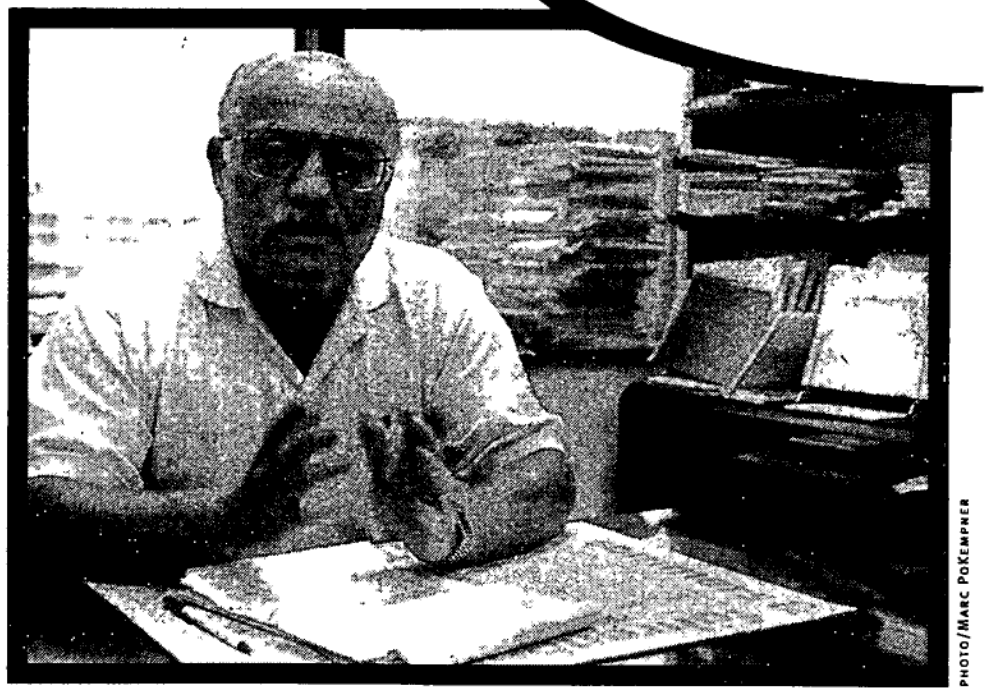
length of their workday. They and other reformers continued to protest bad contracts and demanded union representation of their grievances and the right to speak out at union meetings. They also objected to second-class treatment of the growing ranks of part-time workers, which the union had permitted as a concession to management. McCormick, who'd started at UPS part-time in 1961, was among those reformers. "My issue was that you couldn't get anything done with the union," he says. "It was a company union."

In the mid-70s this small vocal opposition—maybe 50 out of 12,000 members in Local 705—began linking up with dissident groups that were emerging around the country, including PROD (Professional Drivers Council for Safety and Health), UPSurge, and Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). But the UPS reformers also knew they had to find allies among the other trucking and warehouse workers in their local, and they had to overcome the difficulties of organizing part-time workers, who typically thought of the job as temporary and were more likely to quit than fight over injustices.

One of the sympathetic souls McCormick found was Gerald Zero, an easygoing truck driver who'd grown up in a politically progressive working-class family in Cicero. He was a self-described troublemaker at his small Teamster local, where union leaders had negotiated a weak contract, then refused to show it to the workers or enforce its pathetic provisions. That local was folded into Local 705 around 1972, and by the early 80s Zero was one of the leaders in the fight against Peick's business agents who were trying to persuade workers to accept deep pay cuts by threatening them with the loss of their jobs. Zero lost that battle, then joined TDU, where he met McCormick. He and McCormick ran to become delegates to the 1986 Teamster national convention, where delegates would vote on broad constitutional and policy issues for the entire union, but they lost.

Soon after, they heard about the independent-minded leader of a New York UPS Teamster local, Ron Carey, who was challenging in federal court the Teamster rule that required a two-thirds vote of members to reject a proposed contract—which had made it easy for leaders to ram through bad settlements. Zero and McCormick sent him $20 to help cover legal costs. After he won,



PHOTO/MARC POKEMPNER

Carey sent them back a check for $14 with a note that said, "Thanks. I didn't need all of it." It was a striking gesture in a union notorious for officers who abused their expense accounts, collected multiple fat salaries and pensions, and were sometimes caught embezzling.

In 1989 various national Teamster leaders—including Daniel Ligurotis, who'd been elected secretary-treasurer of Local 705, the highest post, in 1986—signed a consent decree with the federal government to avoid prosecution under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute for allowing organized crime to influence the union. The decree mandated a government-supervised direct election of top officers, and in 1991 Carey ran for president.

The Teamsters had been a major power in Chicago for many decades, and they were the largest union in the region (even today, despite losses because of plant closings and bankruptcies, there are still about 110,000 members in 17 different locals in the greater Chicago area). Several of the biggest locals, including 705, had long had special status within the union, partly because Chicago has always been a major transportation hub. Chicago locals could negotiate separate contracts and usually won extras after national negotiations or strikes were over. They also often let others go on strike, then reaped the benefits. All this reinforced their insular mentality and helped local leaders consoli-

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date their hold on power.

At the time of the consent decree, according to the Justice Department and later investigations by the Independent Review Board the decree established, some leaders of these locals had close ties to the mob, were misusing union funds, or were tyrannically controlling who could hold office. Even in locals with no proved corruption or mob ties, the leaders often gave an elite special privileges and higher pay; in turn, that elite gave the leaders enough votes to ignore the needs of many members, especially blacks and Latinos, new immigrants, women, and workers in small firms. The union pension funds and health-care funds—which were jointly controlled by union and employer representatives—as well as the dues of these "forgotten Teamsters," as Carey called them, often served as a jackpot for local leaders.

Many Chicago Teamster locals had long been guilty of the worst kind of machine politics and patronage. Yet the union leaders' macho bluster and their promises to "fix" things through their connections or through force appealed to many workers, just as machine politics had struck many working-class voters as a tough-minded way to take care of business—though in both cases there was ample evidence that the machine took care of only a minority of its constituents. It's probably not entirely coincidence that the big challenge to the Teamster patronage machine came a few years after Harold Washington upset the Chicago political machine.

The Chicago reformers believed that if Carey became president of the Teamsters it would help their cause immensely. When he began his campaign, he promised to clean up corruption and make the union democratic—not just to do good, but to make the union stronger. He said that if the members were more involved and had more control over their union, then the union would better serve their interests and would have the kind of real power that comes from large numbers of people working toward the same goal.

The Teamsters had a reputation for muscle that came from the truckers' ability to shut down delivery of critical goods. But it was muscle that had delivered mainly when the economy was booming in the 1960s, when the trucking industry had been regulated and industry could pass on the cost of contracts. When stagflation and recession hit in the 70s and 80s and the trucking industry was deregulated, this Teamster muscle went flabby. Union officials began handing concessions to large companies such as UPS and trucking firms, against which they'd once scored major victories. The officials also gained a reputation for signing sweetheart contracts with smaller employers, sometimes persuading companies fighting unionization that they were better off accepting a corrupt union over a more honest or militant one. The union officials collected dues, even the occasional kickback, and the employers got labor peace.

Carey rejected the lavish perks of the "country-club" crowd of Teamster leaders. He not only included rank-and-file Teamsters on his slate but promised that they'd be the heart of the union, involved in everything from negotiating contracts to organizing new members. He appealed to members to take responsibility, to think of the Teamsters as "our union," not "the union." It was the vision that had long animated reformers in Chicago, one of the least hospitable spots in the country for Carey.

Carey faced two old-guard slates, one of which included Ligurotis (who in the mid-

dle of the campaign shot and killed his own son at Teamster headquarters, saying that it was in self-defense). Carey campaigned energetically, meeting Teamsters on docks, in factories, at airports, in offices, and at trucking barns. And he had zealous support from the TDU network and independent reformers such as Zero and McCormick, who often accompanied him when he visited Chicago.

Carey won, with 48 percent of the vote. He made some small overtures toward the established Chicago leaders, but most of them gave him the cold shoulder, particularly after he began working with the government against corruption and the influence of organized crime in the union. A minority of local leaders around the country professed support for reform and for Carey, while the old guard worked to undermine him at every turn, even sabotaging strikes and illegally using members' dues to finance an anti-Carey movement. Plenty of union officials around the country also fought against members having more of a voice in their union, though hundreds of them would eventually be removed from office and barred from the union for corruption, working with organized crime, or other charges. More than 75 locals would be put under the control of a union trustee until they could be returned to the control of the members in a fair election.

Gerald Zero is willing to cooperate with James Hoffa: "We'll see what he's going to do. We'll give him the chance his people never gave Ron Carey."

PHOTO/MARC POKEMPNER

In 1993 Carey put Local 705 into trusteeship on the recommendation of the Independent Review Board, one of a half dozen trusteeships imposed in Chicago. He appointed Zero and McCormick assistant trustees under his trusted aide Ed Burke, though in 1994 Burke would move on and Zero and McCormick would take over.

The trustees started by selling off the local's eight Lincoln Town Cars, cutting salaries (Zero's was cut from $115,000 to $85,000, and all officers' future pay hikes were tied to members' contractual increases), eliminating deadwood staff positions (one high-paid business agent had only one member to keep track of), dropping lavish parties (the Christmas blowout for staff and employers—no rank-and-file members had been invited—had cost more than $30,000 in 1992), and cutting outside legal fees by half. Under Peick and then Ligurotis, Local 705 had wound up with operating losses of $4.5 million over the previous seven years; in the period just before the trustees took over, the losses were running close to $1 million a year. According to a 1994 letter Zero sent Carey, the trustees also found that local leaders had been responsible for "sweetheart contracts, non-enforcement of contracts, and under-the-table concessions."

The worst problems were in the pension fund and the health-care fund, which had been set up in place of health insurance and paid for the local's clinic. According to an innovative $4 million civil RICO lawsuit filed by the local in 1995—intended "to redress a pervasive, corrosive, and pernicious pattern of corruption in the management of Local 705's pension and health care funds"—the IRB had found that the two funds improperly paid Ligurotis $120,000 as administrator. After a Department of Labor investigation, Ligurotis agreed to repay the money, then had union executive board minutes fabricated giving him a retroactive pay increase and used that money to reimburse the funds. The suit—which was eventually settled out of court, netting the union $10 million—also alleged that Ligurotis had pumped $2 mil-

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lion in pension-fund money into a short-lived restaurant in the union's Teamster City building on Ashland Avenue that had been set up by a longtime associate of his who happened to be a convicted felon with ties to organized crime. The suit claimed that the local's health clinic had grossly overpaid a part-time medical director, also a friend of Ligurotis's, and alleged that while the lawyer for the health and pension funds was receiving "hundreds of thousands of dollars" from the union, he was also working as Ligurotis's personal lawyer, which "facilitated and implemented Ligurotis's looting schemes." The suit also contended that Ligurotis, working with the Luchese organized-crime family, extorted $25,000 from Amerford International Corporation "in return for labor peace in Chicago and concessions involving Amerford employees' employment rights and welfare benefits."

The trustees shut down the health clinic, which had been losing a fortune, and replaced it with a more conventional health-insurance plan that provided the local's far-flung membership more choices. They also reorganized the pension plan, which resulted in increases for everyone covered and ended the corrupt deals that had let some employers avoid contributing to the fund.

Burke and Zero also got rid of 14 of the local's 39 business agents, who are supposed to oversee the handling of grievances, the negotiating of contracts, and the organizing of new members, though they'd done little under Ligurotis. Later Zero also insisted that the remaining agents get away from their desks and out into the workplaces. He and other leaders also tripled the number of union stewards and, for the first time at UPS, appointed stewards for the part-time workers; they also appointed many more women and minorities in all leadership positions. Zero, who believed he'd gained enormously from the training the international had given him, also had the local start an extensive training program for the stewards, offering classes by faculty from local universities on subjects that ranged from the nuts and bolts of filing grievances to analyzing the image of workers and unions in popular culture.

Most important, the local stopped the old pattern of neglecting grievances and began taking many more cases to arbitration. A new study by Robert Bruno of the University of Illinois' Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations shows that in the 15 years before the trusteeship, an average of 85 grievances a year went to a review panel; after 1995, the average was 185 a year. Bruno also found that before the trusteeship workers had won only 10 percent of grievances; after, they won 88 percent. Between 1995 and 1998 the local won $2 million in back pay and penalties in arbitration, which the local's newsletter says is "more than all other Teamster locals in the state combined have won in 10 years." Where supervisors once sent workers home until their grievances were heard, workers now usually stayed on the job—thanks in part to Carey, who'd pushed to have the national UPS and freight contracts include provisions that in most cases workers would be considered innocent until proved guilty.

Perhaps the most dramatic change was in the union officials' attitude. According to Bennie Jackson, business agents used to tell part-timers at UPS, "If you get UPS angry, there's nothing we can do." When full-time workers complained about company practices they were told, "You're lucky you've got a job." The new stewards and business agents began fighting for members more consistently, often organizing the workers to apply pressure themselves.

Zero and McCormick also pushed the rank and file to become more involved in the union. For the first time, regular union members began serving on every contract-negotiating committee. "The companies don't like it," Zero says. "But it's their contract. They have a right to be there." They also often understand the issues at stake better than the business agents do. Members also began voting on all contracts in secret ballots; in the past there hadn't even been ratification votes.

Under Zero and McCormick's leadership, the local improved its newsletter, offered more educational meetings, and encouraged members to use the local's new lending library. Attendance at union-hall meetings soared from a couple hundred to as many as 1,200. The debate was often fractious, but for a change, the opposition had a chance to fully vent its opinions.

Zero and McCormick also increased the pace of organizing, relying heavily on a crew of about 40 dedicated volunteer members. Gregory Foster, a 35-year-old steward at Roadway trucking, had opposed Zero and McCormick, but after he started attending union meetings he changed his mind. "They were sincere about what they wanted to do—putting the union back in the hands of members," he says. He soon began volunteering to do organizing on the weekend. "With all this local's efforts to provide better opportunities for members, that pushes me to do whatever I can, whenever it's needed." The two men Zero hired as full-time organizers, Frank Fosco and Paul DiGrazia, had also initially opposed the trusteeship, but they too changed their minds. Fosco says, "Now when you work for this local you're giving, not taking."

Some of the most striking transformations took place in the way the local represented workers who'd been ignored in the past. In the mid-80s, after it absorbed another Teamster local through a trusteeship, Local 705 represented about 4,500 workers in the moving business in Chicago, but by 1993 it represented less than 200. The former business agent for that division told Richard de Vries, a business agent appointed by Zero, that he couldn't explain the decline. De Vries and the local's lawyers eventually discovered that it was difficult for a business agent to serve such a balkanized industry, where workers had widely varying starting times and rarely stayed at any one location for more than a day. Ligurotis had essentially given up on retaining these members. According to a 1993 National Labor Relations Board decision, he and other leaders negotiated members-only or no-new-members contracts with employers of these workers that preserved decent pay and benefits

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for a small, dwindling band of privileged, usually white workers but excluded the predominately black and Latino casuals, who often worked full-time but received low pay, few benefits, and no union representation. De Vries says one moving-company owner told him, "I came in here like now. I paid Dan Ligurotis, and I had labor peace. And he had what he wanted."

Local 705 challenged some of these contracts in court, and the Seventh Circuit Court ruled them illegal. Yet moving companies have continued to fight inclusion of the casuals. As a consequence, Local 705 has been negotiating contracts that give all employees working at least 1,000 hours a year—roughly half a typical work year—the same basic benefits as full-time workers. De Vries has increased the number of movers active in the local, who now total 1,000.

Companies often try to escape paying for better benefits or higher wages by using nonunion subcontractors, and local government agencies, under pressure to privatize, also often try to avoid union contractors, who typically pay their workers twice the nonunion rate. Confronted with the decision of the school board to hire a nonunion company for its move from its Pershing Road headquarters last summer, De Vries organized the moving-company workers, getting an overwhelming majority to sign union-authorization cards. Then he went to the new board office in the Loop and organized support among the building-trades workers, many of whom were already upset with the board for privatizing many tradespeople out of their jobs. The Teamsters set up picket lines, and the construction workers wouldn't cross. The board threatened an injunction. One worker told a school board official who tried to get the tradespeople to cross the picket line, "You can take away the pickets, and we still won't go in. You can't make us work." The board soon agreed that union terms would be followed for the remainder of the job and that future work would go to unionized moving firms.

The local quickly began training some of the new union movers as stewards. Pablo Vasquez, now a steward at Beltmann North American, says, "Before when we had a problem I'd have to wait a week or two and sometimes still didn't get an answer. People were never involved in decisions. We didn't have a steward. Before we were just paying to be in the union. Now, the way I see it, they protect our rights, even on minor things. Before they said, 'Don't worry about it.' Now we straighten it out right away. I think it's working for the better. We want the company to grow, but we want to be treated right."

Many Teamster employers apparently thought they could buy labor peace cheaply. "Some employers didn't bother to read the contract—because it didn't matter," says Peggy Hillman, an attorney for Local 705. "We'd say to employers, 'We've got a grievance because it violates the contract.' They said, 'I never agreed to that.' They hadn't even read it. We came upon all these statements from employers that they had oral, handshake agreements with Danny Ligurotis that varied terms of the agreement, and they said, 'We've been doing this for years.'" Hillman says handshake agreements aren't illegal, but they're "suspicious and very uncommon in reputable labor circles."

Zero says he's willing to talk to employers anytime, but not about special deals. "If you want a contract without words, you won't have it here," he says. "It's better for both sides. Every one of [the oral agreements] benefited the employer." Early in his tenure, Zero assigned a steward to a small trucking firm that had never had one. The owner called and asked for a meeting at a restaurant on Taylor Street. At one point, Zero says, the owner turned to him and said, "I always got along with Danny. We didn't have any problems. We didn't need a steward. What do you need? A car? Money? Women?" He placed money on the table. Zero says he answered, "Just take care of the members and I'll be happy." Then he left, paying his part of the check.

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Local 705 held its election ending the trusteeship in 1995, and four slates of candidates ran, including one with Zero as secretary-treasurer, McCormick as president, and Bennie Jackson as recording secretary. They won, but with only 39 percent of the vote. They soon made it clear that they were determined to go beyond cleaning up the local—they wanted to create a model local. "The main thing we wanted to do was to educate the members," says Zero. "They were in the dark. People couldn't speak out. Membership involvement was the key thing."

Local 705 had grown rapidly—because UPS expanded, but also because organizers signed up new members in such jobs as trucking, food processing, warehousing, oil transport, and airfreight, as well as members in shops where their locals had ignored them. About 4,000 workers have been signed up since the trusteeship began in 1993. Nineteen workplaces have voted on whether to join a union, and the local has won 13 times. "We try to pound ego into them," Fosco says. "Companies break egos. We say, 'Don't let anyone ever crush you.'"

The local now has about 17,500 members working under 430 different contracts, making it the largest Teamster local in Chicago and one of the largest in the country. It also has one of the Teamsters' highest levels of voter turnout for union elections and one of their highest rates of contributions from members for political campaigns.

Many old-guard locals, while historically close to machine Democrats, also cultivate ties with Republicans. A former secretary-treasurer of Teamster Local 714, William Hogan Jr. (see sidebar), was George Ryan's labor liaison in the last gubernatorial race; the Teamster Joint Council, which includes leaders from all the locals in the area, endorsed no one in that race. Like most other locals in the city, Local 705 backs more Democrats than Republicans, but unlike them, it has put money and energy into a wide range of alternative political strategies and community-organizing efforts. It backed the New Party, a progressive minority party that often endorses liberal Democrats such as Congressman Danny Davis, and the Labor Party, which was founded two years ago and doesn't yet run candidates (250 Local 705 members have joined the party). The local has worked with community groups such as ACORN and Operation Push and community-labor coalitions such as Jobs With Justice. Local 705 delegations have also shown up regularly at demonstrations and on picket lines, and not just in Chicago; they've supported actions such as the Detroit newspaper strike and the California strawberry pickers' organizing drive. "The big change is the Teamsters turning outwards rather than inwards," says de Vries. "Should reform be about working people as a class, a group, a generality? Or is it just looking after its own members? At a stewards' meeting we had a speaker about sweatshops in the garment industry. That represents a significant change over who you'd have in a union hall talking to members in the past."

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But for all the changes they'd made, Zero and McCormick were still fighting a large bloc of old-guard loyalists. In 1996 the two men ran to become delegates to the national Teamsters convention, which is held every five years. One of their opponents was Dane Passo, who'd been appointed a business agent by Ligurotis, then dismissed by Zero and McCormick. From the beginning Passo, who now tries to distance himself from Ligurotis, attacked everything Zero and McCormick did. He even scoffed at the idea of involving more members in negotiations because that would mean relying on people "not knowledgeable enough to win." He had a history of trying to provoke opponents and, according to a 1999 IRB report, had "engaged in [a] pattern of assaults dating back to the 1991 delegate nomination meeting" and had been "disciplined for disrupting Local union meetings in 1994."

One night in March 1996, Passo and a small group of supporters came to the union hall intending to campaign at the stewards' meeting inside, which was against union rules. Someone stopped them at the door, then called Zero and other union officials. Zero told Passo he couldn't enter, and then people from both sides began fighting. Accounts of what happened vary wildly, but there was apparently at least some pushing, pulling, and punching. Passo claims Zero threw him down a flight of stairs. Zero says he may have touched Passo's arm, but Passo then dropped to the ground, shouting about his back.

In any event, Passo and some of his supporters ended up on the floor and were carried outside. There they waited—laughing, by some accounts—for police and ambulances to arrive. Nobody was admitted to a hospital, yet Passo and his supporters filed charges against Zero and other union officials, claiming that they'd been physically assaulted. Zero says some police on the scene suggested that he file a countercomplaint, but he didn't take the charges seriously. He still insists, "I never threw a punch, hit anybody, or kicked anybody."

That October Zero was convicted in court of a misdemeanor charge, which was sustained on appeal. At the request of the IRB, the local set up a hearing panel of members who weren't immediately involved in the conflict. Last summer they found that Zero had violated the union constitution and ruled that he should pay a $5,000 fine and take a course in anger management. The acting international president, Tom Sever, added a three-month suspension to the penalty.

Zero and McCormick lost the delegates race to Passo and other old-guard candidates, but they immediately turned to campaigning hard for Ron Carey, who was running for reelection. Carey's opponent, nominated at the national convention by the old guard, was James Hoffa. Passo was his midwest coordinator.

McCormick and Zero scorned Hoffa as an attorney with a name made famous by his father, with no experience as a union official and virtually none working in a Teamster job. They applauded Carey's achievements, but they also challenged him. They were disappointed that this campaign lacked the grassroots fervor of the first. "He could have been the greatest ever," McCormick says, "but everything he did he had to do by himself. Carey didn't listen to enough rank-and-file people. If we keep the rank-and-file people involved on different committees and panels we won't lose touch. You've got to get out there too. I know Ron got to New York, but you need to do it more." Zero says he'd seen indications of problems a couple of years before, when Carey had often ignored his advice on how the trusteeships should be handled. "Occasionally he'd get angry at me," he says. "He didn't like my direct approach. We tried to get him to adopt the theory in locals like 714 or 743 [two other Chicago locals put into trusteeship] that you clean house and you find rank and filers better than the people originally there. But they botched several trusteeships. Ron had trouble trusting certain people—maybe not even John or me."

Carey won, though the vote was close. Most giant Teamster locals around the country gave him 75 to 95 percent of their votes, though the big Chicago locals gave him only 25 to a little over 50 percent.

Soon Carey was preparing UPS workers to go on strike. Starting a year before the contract was to expire, workers were polled about what issues they thought were most important. They were then sent repeated mailings on those issues and encouraged to join monthly protests about them.

McCormick, Zero, and other staff worked hard to build support in Chicago, and on August 4, 1997, Local 705 went on strike with the rest of the union, even though technically it didn't have to. (Chicago Local 710, an old-guard local that represents some UPS drivers, didn't take part in the strike.) Carey and AFL-CIO president John Sweeney joined Local 705 leaders at a rally outside the Jefferson Street UPS center, where rank-and-file members joined their leaders in explaining to supporters and the press why they were striking and in expressing support for the concerns of other UPS workers, such as the part-timers.

Zero and McCormick saw the strike, which lasted 15 days, as a tribute to the new style of rank-and-file organizing they believed represented the future of the union. Passo denounced the strike as a defeat. "They hurt UPS by putting them on strike," he argues. "The only reason [Carey] called the strike was political."

Within days of the end of the strike, a federally appointed election officer ruled that because of improprieties in fund-raising by the Carey campaign, the election would have to be repeated. As the investigation proceeded, it became clear that two political consultants hired to run the Carey campaign and do direct-mail appeals had raised funds from individuals outside the union by arranging to have the union make contributions to the individuals' favorite political causes, including organizations such as Citizen Action, a national coalition of public-interest groups. The contributions were consistent with the Teamsters' general political strategy—Citizen Action had received many earlier but much smaller Teamster contributions—but the quid pro quo arrangements and other kickbacks were serious abuses. The investigation made it clear that Carey wasn't monitoring his campaign or even union operations very carefully, though it still isn't clear whether he knew exactly what was going on. In 1997 the IRB removed him from office, to the dismay of reformers like Zero and McCormick.

Former Carey supporters began scram-

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bling for someone who could challenge Hoffa, who was allowed to run again even though an election officer had reported financial irregularities in his campaign too. After their first choice dropped out for health reasons, the reformers rallied around Tom Leedham, the intense 47-year-old president of an Oregon local and head of the union's large warehouse division. Leedham had pushed member education and direct action in several successful contract fights, but he wasn't widely known. After a visit to Chicago he picked McCormick to run with him as secretary-treasurer, the number two office. "Local 705 is really a model," Leedham said in an interview during the campaign. "It is one of the most important locals in the country, a leader in reform under difficult circumstances. They've been very successful and are getting more successful. It shows what reform can do."

Leedham, McCormick, and the rest of their slate were at a great disadvantage. Hoffa had phenomenal name recognition, and celebrity-stricken reporters who normally had no interest in the Teamsters or unions were writing fawning stories about him. He'd been campaigning for nearly four years and would spend nearly $6 million before the day of the election. Almost 90 percent of local union officers had endorsed him. The relatively unknown Leedham slate had about five months to campaign, a total of $250,000, and very little press coverage. But they relentlessly visited work sites to talk with members, even locals where the officers were hostile.

Hoffa's campaign relied on the almost mystical faith many members had that he'd inherited something from his father that would restore the power of the Teamsters of yesteryear. Leedham and McCormick's campaign relied on the solidarity of union members who'd been educated to take into account how the Teamsters fit into the economy and politics of the country in a new era.

When the votes were counted last December, Hoffa had won with 55 percent, though the turnout was relatively small. Leedham and McCormick got 39 percent—140,000 votes—and a Saint Louis union official got the rest. Local 705 gave Leedham 3,965 votes and Hoffa 2,797. "My feeling is we don't have anything to be ashamed of," said McCormick. "There are at least 140,000 people who believe in rank-and-file democracy. I found there are a lot of members who care. They are in crafts like UPS, freight, and car-haul. A lot of people in other divisions take everything for granted. I think what's needed more is not just organizing people into the Teamsters but also internal organizing. There are people out there willing to fight."

There were rumors that Hoffa would put Local 705 into a trusteeship, though he hasn't said anything to that effect. Zero, whose term is up in December 2000, said he was willing to cooperate with Hoffa if he did the right thing. "We'll see what he's going to do," he said. "We'll give him the chance his people never gave Ron Carey." Yet he and McCormick were skeptical that Hoffa would preserve the reforms that had been made in the Teamsters, especially given who his supporters had been. The IRB had already charged three members of his slate with campaign misdeeds. In one case a candidate for vice president, Thomas Ryan, had dropped off the slate after the IRB charged him with "embezzling Local 107 funds." Ryan was found guilty and suspended from the union for five years, but the IRB claims that he continued to be involved in Hoffa's campaign.

Zero said he didn't plan to change things at Local 705 because of the election. "We'll do the job until they vote us out or carry us out," he said. Shortly after the vote count, during the Christmas rush, the local went out on a one-day strike against UPS over a variety of grievances, such as supervisors doing the work of union members and the failure of UPS to hire more full-time workers as the 1997 contract requires. The company could hire 50 more full-time workers, McCormick argued, if the supervisors stopped doing work that union members were supposed to do. The local was solidly behind the strike, but some of the seasonal part-time workers crossed the picket line, as did the pro-Hoffa Local 710. "How you gonna have a militant union," said Zero, "with other locals crossing your picket line?"

In January reformers suffered another blow when the IRB concluded that Zero should be suspended from office for a year because he'd been convicted in the scuffle with Passo, though he wouldn't be required to pay a fine. That punishment was far lighter than penalties the IRB had imposed

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in similar cases. IRB administrator John Cronin explained in his report that Zero's actions hadn't been premeditated and hadn't been intended to curtail anyone's rights. Moreover, he said, Passo and his supporters had been found "guilty of intentional provocation" by the election officer enforcing the federal consent decree, and they'd known "that they were not permitted to engage in... campaigning inside the union hall."

Zero is still permitted to attend union meetings, but for the rest of the year, McCormick, Jackson, and the other reform leaders will have to do without him. He will be eligible to run again in the local's next election.

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Of all the leaders of Chicago-area locals who once professed support for reform, those at Local 705 have remained the most steadfastly committed to making the Teamsters an aggressively innovative union controlled by the members. They've steadily gained support among the local's 17,500 members, but they still face a solid core of at least several thousand backers of Hoffa and the old guard. Reformers in many other area locals have suffered setbacks, though they're still a strong minority opposition to the old guard.

Why haven't reformers gained more ground? For one thing, there are factions—the UPS guys are in the ascendancy, and many of the freight guys who used to wield power feel left out. Of course some UPS workers support the old guard, and some freight truckers back the reformers. But the old guard and their allies resent being excluded from what were once the perks of holding the union office, and they resent the shift to democratic, rules-based ways of distributing gains and resolving grievances. They're also threatened by the shift of power from the leaders to the members: if members see that they're the ones who have power, then a union leader can't trade favors for favors.

It's also true that most workers have little experience with democratic unionism. Many of the members who suffered most from the local's previous neglect still don't come to meetings, take advantage of the local's training and educational opportunities, or even vote. Many union members are apathetic about politics, including union politics. And immigrants, especially those who don't speak English well, are often slow to get involved in the union.

In the end, the battle over reform in the Teamsters often involves deep-seated issues that go far beyond any rational calculus of what policies produce the greatest good for the greatest number. To those on the outside looking in, reform seems stymied most often by entrenched biases; it's as if two distinct worldviews were clashing under all the debates over contracts and grievance procedures. But sometimes the problem is simply that many individuals doubt their own abilities or are apathetic about their jobs. McCormick and Zero seem to be slowly winning ground on both fronts, but it's an endless battle. Still, says McCormick, "I didn't think it was possible 705 would be this deep into reform, that you'd get power back into the hands of the rank and file." ■

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